

Phoebe's Story

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Summary: Billy rescues a young girl from her abusive, obsessive father.

1. Chapter 1

PHOEBE'S STORY

Based on The Tall Man's last episode, Phoebe

Characters belong, to some extent, history. Others are credited, for I own nothing: Samuel A. Peeples, creator; Lincoln County Production Company, Revue Studios, and NBC.

The old man was spare and gaunt and carried a Bible wherever he went, proselytizing.. He fancied himself a preacher, but his family were the sole subjects of his sermons. They soon tired of his overbearing, self-righteous ways. His wife left him, which turned him bitter. His daughter was all that was left and he was determined that she should walk the straight and narrow. To this end he supervised her night and day; rarely allowing her out; beating her often; lecturing her so often at the dinner table she couldn't eat.

When she finally managed to meet a man, perhaps out of desperation she fell in love with him. Her father was enraged. He stepped over the line when he shot the man in the back, took his gun and left his body in an alleyway. Somehow he got away with it. His daughter found the murder weapon two years later. Realizing that her father would kill any man who showed an interest in her, she, too, fled.

-oOo-

Pat Garrett was opening the door to the sheriff's office one morning when he spied Billy Bonney limping down the street, a rifle in one hand and his saddle in the other. There were bloodstains on his shirt and his face was creased with both dirt and weariness.

'What happened to you, Billy?'

The boy mopped his brow with his gun-laden hand. 'Mornin,' Patrick,' he said, and turned to walk to the livery stable across the street. It seemed he couldn't make it another step, but he kept going.

'Just like that, huh? You come waltzing into town after six days and all you can say is Mornin' Patrick?'

Billy wearily let the saddle fall to the ground. Sometimes Pat Garrett got on his nerves. Sure, he was just trying to mentor; the man was his friend and Billy knew Pat cared about him ¦ but sometimes he just wished Patrick would let it rest. He decided to take refuge in a lie.

'Well, if you're wonderin,' I, uh, lost my old pony about five days ago, Patrick, up in Baker's Canyon up there, they had a landslide up there.'

'Uh huh.'

'Yeah. I guess I can be glad I didn't take my horse. He's in the stable being tended to; had a bad hoof or somethin'.'

'Yeah, what about the cattle Tundall sent you up to Rawlings to get?'

'I, uh, I never got there, I been laid up with a twisted ankle. Don't tell me old Tundall's all het up on account of I been laid up all this time?'

'No - he's just been worried,' said Pat. 'That's all.'

'That's more than I can say about the people around here,' Billy replied. 'Course, you care to come looking for me, Patrick?'

He headed on toward the livery stable.

'That ankle got well in a hurry, didn't it, Billy?' Pat called after him, giving him the lie. 'Especially with all that walking you been doing.'

Billy turned and glared at him. 'Got any more questions, Patrick?'

Shaking his head, Pat turned back to the sheriff's office and Billy limped on up to the barn. He slung his saddle in the corner and leaned his rifle against the wall, calling to the livery owner, Mr. Traker.

There was no answer. He greeted his golden palomino, 'Hey, boy, how ya doin'? Doin' all right?'

The livery owner came in. 'How's he look to ya, Billy?'

'You did right well, Mr. Traker, looks real good, you got the swelling down and everything. Uh ¦ did you say one dollar?'

'Yep.'

'That's what I thought; much obliged.'

He paid the man and reached in his shirt pocket for something else.

'Say, I, ah â€| I got a thing here; I'm not gentle with my hands like you are, wonder if maybe you can fix this up for me?'

He held out a thin broken necklace with a heart pendant.

The old man took it, studying it. 'Let me get my glasses and a pair of pliers.'

'No,' said Billy, 'I'll tell you what, I'm real thirsty; I've been riding a long ways - I'll be over at the saloon over there. Can you watch my rifle for me there? And don't scratch it,' he said, motioning to the necklace. 'I'll have your hide.' Billy was only half joking.

'Somethin' valuable, huh, Billy?'

Billy halted in his tracks. Slowly he turned and said, 'Just â€| get it fixed, Mr. Traker.'

-oOo-

Billy walked into the saloon. 'Gimme a beer, Charley.'

A spare, gaunt old man in a long black coat and string tie standing at the other end of the bar was talking to the bartender. 'If you didn't see her at the hotel I thought someone else might have mentioned her.'

'I took her for a runaway girl,' said Charley.

The old man turned to Billy. 'Maybe you've seen her, sir.'

'No,' Billy said. 'I just got in.'

'A rather pretty girl,' the old man insisted. 'Nineteen. Red hair, green eyes. Wearing a calico dress. Why, I've been searching for her for over a week now.'

'Where'd you start from?' asked Billy, suspiciously.

'Milford Junction, fifty miles south.'

'What are you going to do when you find her?'

'I'm going to teach her a lesson she'll always remember. She's a Godless girl! Even though she is my own â€| she belongs in a nunnery!' He slapped his thigh in anger. 'And that's where I'm going to put her, once I lay my hands on her again!'

Just then Mr. Traker came in with the necklace in his hand. 'There she is, Billy, good as new.' He threw the necklace to Billy who deftly caught it.

As Billy held it up to inspect it, the old man behind him asked, 'Where did you get that?!!' He took it out of Billy's hand. 'It's HER necklace!'

Billy pushed him back. 'Get your hands off!'

_ 'What did you do with my daughter?!!'_

'I lost her.' Billy turned in anguish and leaned on the bar. It was some minutes before he could speak. 'See, I knew she was scared. Runnin' from someone. I saved her life five days ago. Her horse fell over a cliff up in Baker Canyon. I took her to a trapper's cabin - no one there to help us. Just her and me.'

'That was five days ago!' the old man barked.

'I stayed there all this time.'

'I don't believe your story, boy! How'd you get that bloodstain on your shirt?!!'

'I'm tellin' you the truth, mister.'

'Then why'd you lie about losing your horse, Billy?' The question came from Pat Garrett, who had stepped through the door. He must have heard the whole thing.

'I didn't want to have to do any explaining, Patrick. This was my business,' Billy stated unequivocally.

'Well, now it's mine,' said Pat. 'What about the bloodstain?'

'Well, I got it when I killed some rabbits while I was taking care of the girl! Now, I've been looking for her ever since she disappeared from the cabin night before last. She just left this torn locket.'

'Looking how?!' the old man demanded to know.

_ 'The best, I could, mister!'_

'Nobody around here ever heard of her. All she left me was a name.'

'What name?' the old man demanded to know.

'Lily Varnell.'

_ 'Lily Varnell? Who you fooling, boy?'

'Well, that's her name, I mean, that's what she told me!'

'I don't believe she ever told that to you! Where would she pick a name like Lily Varnell?'

'Well, maybe she lied to me, mister, because she didn't want you to find her!'

_ You're the one who's lying. I say you never knew my daughter's

name. Because you killed her. For her necklace!'

The man's quivering, self-righteous, God-delusional manner was pissing Billy off, and at this, he got to his feet in anger.

'Sheriff, I'm ordering you to put this man in jail! To be tried for the murder of my daughter â€“ Phoebe. Phoebe Canfield. I'm ordering you, sheriff!'

'Mr. Canfield, nobody orders me,' Pat reminded him. 'Let's you and me go over to my office, Billy.'

'Are you takin' my gun, Patrick?'

'I didn't say anything about taking your gun. Just taking a walk. Come on.'

Billy clutched the necklace in his fist as he complied.

-oOo-

SIX DAYS AGO

The summer moon beamed brilliantly down on the prairie, so bright that the stars retreated behind its glare. The swift pounding of hoofs on the ground alerted Billy Bonney, who was down in an arroyo, giving a hatful of water to the horse he was riding. It was easy to see in the shadow of the arroyo; not so much on the topside in the glare of the moon. By the sound, it was a lone rider. The horse was heaving; hoofs flying.

The horse Billy was riding on this trip didn't have the stamina his palomino did, but his beloved friend was back in Lincoln being treated for a strained tendon. He'd borrowed this one to ride to Rawlings to buy cattle for John Tundall.

He didn't know he wouldn't make it that far.

The sound of the hoofs fading in the distance alarmed Billy. They were headed toward Baker Canyon. The rider either didn't know the territory or â€“

Swiftly, he clapped his wet hat on his head and mounted the horse. They climbed out of the arroyo. He could see the figure in the distance, riding hell-for-leather straight for the canyon. He had to warn the man.

'Hyah!' Billy yelled, digging his heels into the pony's sides. It took off with a jerk and raced after the rider in the distance. With his eyes adjusted to the moonlight it was easy to see the figure as his horse closed the distance. But wait â€“ that wasn't a man. There were billowing skirts. What the â€“ ?

Suddenly there was a loud scream and horse and rider seemed to vanish over the edge of the earth. Billy's worst fears came true. He urged his horse forward, slowing as they approached the canyon rim. Luckily, the river had not cut so deeply here and shale walls lined the canyon. He knew they could give way in an instant, tumbling anyone who trod them down into the river. Maybe the rider thought she

could ride it down; maybe she didn't know it was there â€“ he didn't know.

He dismounted and carefully peered over the edge. The horse the woman had been riding was dead, crumpled in a heap, body blocking part of the river that swirled around it. The woman had been thrown further into the water which probably saved her life. She was flailing against the current. Suddenly she caught and clung to a boulder in the middle of the fast-running stream.

'Stay there! I'm coming!' Billy yelled. He looked for a way down that would support him and his horse. About ninety yards down there was a passable slope. He made his way to it and led his horse carefully down to the canyon floor. He ran up the narrow beach, flung his hat down and hit the water running, not sure of its depth. It went over his head halfway to the boulder and he came up swimming strongly, fighting the current. He caught the boulder and grabbed the woman around the waist.

'I got you, I got you. Listen. This current is strong. Can you help me? Just kick your feet. I'll get you to shore. Kick!'

Choking and gasping, she tried her best. Billy managed to pull against the current and get them both to where they could touch bottom. He pulled the woman onto the sharp shale and collapsed beside her. They lay together, catching their breath.

'What,' he gasped, 'just what were you doing? Didn't you know this was here?'

She raised her head and for the first time Billy got a good look at her face. She was just a girl. Probably not yet twenty! Her face was the saddest he had ever seen. She shook her head. Reaction set in and she began quivering from head to foot.

'Here,' he said, lifting her into his arms, 'let's get you warm and dry. I know an old abandoned trapper's cabin not far from here.'

He carried her to his horse and lifted her to the saddle. After guiding the horse back up the slope, he took his bearings. Damned hard to see the stars with that moon so bright, he thought. He took a bead on the North Star as best he could and turned in that direction, away from the canyon, toward a nearby mountain. They could take shelter in the old cabin and figure out what to do.

2. Chapter 2

Billy stormed into the sheriff's office, flung down his hat and sat in the chair. Pat approached him calmly.

'Phoebe Canfield; that's a pretty name.'

'That's right.'

'Billy, what I don't understand is why you went to so much trouble to lie.'

'I dunno â€“ what other reason could I give, Patrick, to explain being away from six days? I was away for six days! I â€“ I'll have to

tell the story. Didn't want people around here to know â€| '

'To know about Phoebe? You know, Billy, you could have done it a lot easier!' Pat sat down. 'Yeah, I guess sometimes a man doesn't think real straight when he gets mixed up with a woman.'

'No, don't say it like that.'

Pat got in Billy's face. 'You mean in five days she never gave you her right name?'

Billy shook his head. He squirmed in his chair.

'Billy, I know I got a lot of friends around here to make it easier for you if it gets to a jury.'

'Not in this stinking town,' Billy said, rising from his chair. He paced nervously.

'No worse than any other town; people go by past performances.'

Billy decided to lay it on the line with his friend. 'I gotta tell ya, Patrick, I loved that girl.'

'Yeah,' said Pat. 'That's what I wanted to be sure of.'

The two men regarded each other in understanding. Suddenly, an interloper in the form of the girl's father burst in. 'You wanted to be sure of what?' he demanded to know.

'I'd quiet down if I were you, Mr. Canfield,' Pat warned.

'I only want to find out what the boy knows about my daughter,' the old man said in a conciliatory manner.

'I told you, I don't know anything, Canfield,' Billy replied. He turned and walked away.

Canfield looked down at Pat, seated at his desk. 'Did you ever see a bad seed grow, Mr. Garrett? Beautiful flower - something wrong with it - destined for a violent end - evil from the time of its birth.'

'You just shut up about her!' Billy shouted.

'You have quite a temper,' observed the old man, 'haven't you? All those shooting scrapes you've been inâ€|'

'Take it easy, Mr. Canfield,' Pat warned. He knew Billy could be pushed just so far.

'Perhaps it was my fault,' Canfield went on, staring down at Billy. 'Raising her without a mother. But then, some men get married only once. No one suits them after that.'

Billy stared at the floor, holding his temper in - tightly.

'What's your name, boy?' Canfield asked, taunting him.

Pat spoke up for him. 'His name is William Bonney.'

'William H. Bonney,' Billy repeated.

'I'll remember that,' said Canfield. 'For your grave marker.'

Billy shot him a look.

'What did you do with my daughter's body, Mr. Bonney?'

'You're a dirty liar!' Billy rose and got in Canfield's face, threateningly.

Canfield nodded. 'That's what she called me. And all I was trying to do was to keep her from running away â€| from taunting men with her sweet talk, inveigling them into believing that she needed protection against an unreasonable father â€| teasing â€| twisting them â€| that's what she did to you, didn't she, Bonneyâ€|'

Billy wiped his hand across his mouth, keeping his arm high.

'â€|only you killed her!' Canfield accused.

Billy backhanded the old man across the face. Pat rose up and grappled with Billy. The old man had kept taunting, using the very tactics he accused his daughter of doing until he cracked Billy's shell. Pat was attempting to keep Billy from killing the old man with his bare hands. He whirled Billy around and flung him back into the chair. Billy backed down, sitting with his head in his hands, in anguish. Pat turned to the old man.

'Put him in jail,' the old man gasped, 'or I'll kill him.'

Pat stared at him with cold eyes.

'Baker Canyon is out of my jurisdiction,' he stated flatly. 'If what you said happened in Baker Canyon.'

'Then I'm getting a circuit judge. I'm having a warrant issued! And he'd better be here when I get back!'

'Are you threatening me, Mr. Canfield?' Pat Garrett was nearing the end of his rope with the man.

Canfield backed down and left the office.

-oOo-

FLASHBACK

The cabin came into view in the early morning hours; the horizon glowed with the sunrise. Billy reined in the horse in front of the hitching post, dismounted and carefully lowered the girl to the ground. She was unconscious. He tied the horse, slid his gun cautiously out of the holster and kicked open the door to the old cabin, which seemed deserted. He pulled a red phosphorus match out of his pocket and struck it against the sole of his boot. There in the corner - an old table held an oil lamp. He lit it and the cabin's small interior became more visible. There was a bedstead with a layer

of straw, a fireplace and a few cooking pots and crockery, some firewood, not much else.

Billy rushed back outside and carried the girl in. For want of anything better at the moment, he laid her on the straw then brought in his bedroll and spread one of the blankets over her. Then he set about making a fire.

Back outside, he unsaddled the horse and tied him under an overhang by a water bucket. He brought the saddle and saddlebags in and dug through them to see if there was anything he could use. For a cowboy on the range, a supply of water, some gloves, wire cutters, a hammer and a few nails, a supply of jerk and a can of salve were vital. He checked his ammunition. Enough to keep them in rabbits but not enough if they had a problem with Indians. Fortunately, the entire area seemed to be deserted, a fact that was also unfortunate. If the girl recovered they could ride out. If notâ€¦ Billy sighed, glancing at the old shovel standing against the wall.

The girl groaned and stirred on her bed. The small cabin was comfortably warm by now and she threw off the hot blanket.

'Hey, now, Missy - you need to keep that on.'

Her hair and her dress were soaking wet and stained with blood from where the shale had cut her. Warm or not, if she didn't get dry she'd develop a fever.

He shook her shoulder. 'Missâ€¦wake up. Are you with me? Let's get you out of that wet dress.'

She was awake enough to hear and tried to comply. She turned so he could untie the laces in the back of the calico. He removed the wet blanket and held the dry one up as a curtain while she struggled out of the dress and chemise beneath, then lay the blanket over her. With his saddle rope, he rigged a line to dry her things by the fire.

'Miss? You awake? Listen to me. I want you to stay right here until I get back. We gotta have something to eat. Just go back to sleep; you're safe and I'll be right back. I promise.'

She nodded.

Billy went hunting.

-oOo-

PRESENT

Billy set his hat on his head.

'I â€¦ I gotta find her, Patrick.'

'If she's alive,' said Pat.

Did the man think, actually think he had killed the girl?_ Billy wondered. Was he listening to the old man or to me?_

He got up and faced his friend. 'You gotta give me two days. Just two

days â€“ Patrick.'

The old circuit judge that Canfield had fetched wasn't happy about being dragged into Lincoln. It had been a rough journey. He voiced it bitterly to the sheriff, that and the facts of the case. 'Does he expect me to issue a warrant on a crime he can't prove?'

'That's the story,' Pat verified.

'Why did you let him go?' Canfield demanded to know.

'I told you the case was out of my jurisdiction. If the girl's alive, Billy'll find her.'

The circuit judge demanded money from Canfield for expenses and fined him for taking the court's time. Canfield paid him.

'If I ever listen to a wild-eyed story like yours again, I ought to have my head examined!' The judge jammed his hat on his head and stormed out.

Garrett picked up the coffee pot. 'Care for some?'

'I'm not asking for any courtesy!' the old man responded, rudely.

'Just what are you asking for?'

'I pray that boy will find her. How does he intend going about it?'

'If your daughter used the name Lily Varnell then â€“ somehow she must have known the woman in the past.'

'You're saying my daughter knows a loose woman?!"

'I'm saying only that it's possible Billy might find the true Lily Varnell.'

'If Phoebe isn't already dead,' said the old man.

'I don't think so,' stated Garrett, flatly. 'Mr. Canfield, she's running from you. If she's to be found, Billy will have a better chance of finding her than you.'

'In other words, you're telling me to stay in town.'

'For everyone concerned.'

'Yeah. Well, that's one way for a father to find a erring daughter â€“ send a hoodlum after her!'

'Get some sleep,' Pat suggested.

'You're so kind, Mr. Garrett' the old man said facetiously.

FLASHBACK

The rabbit Billy shot was bubbling over the open fire; the wild

onions that flavored it made a mouth-watering aroma. There was a bowl of berries as a side dish.

At first, Billy only allowed the girl a sip of broth from one of the chipped bowls. When she kept that down, he brought her more. She was alert by this time and could prop herself up on her elbow.

'Sorry there's no forks - they must have rusted away. Nobody's used this old cabin in years. The rabbit's cool enough, you just reach right in with your fingers. Eat as much as you want. Plenty of rabbits out there. We get desperate enough, I hear rattlesnake's pretty good, too,' he grinned.

She smiled back at him. Now that her hair was dry he was surprised to discover that it was a lovely strawberry blonde. It framed her face to perfection. She had delicate features, freckles and green eyes. A delicate gold locket on a chain encircled her neck.

After she had eaten, she lay back, exhausted, grimacing.

'How do you feel?' he asked. 'Did you break anything?'

'I â€“ I don't think so. Nothing feels broken. But I hurt all over; it stings.'

'You're all skint up. Shale cuts like glass.' He refrained from asking her just how she got in that predicament and brought the can of salve. 'Here â€“ this is good for that sort of thing.' He dipped his fingers into the can and gently daubed it on her arms and face. One deep cut on her arm required a bandage. He tore a strip from her chemise and wrapped it around her arm. 'You know, you're lucky you didn't break your neck. Your horse is dead. A fall like that â€“ well, you were lucky you hit the water.'

He started to ask why it had happened but thought the better of it. 'You take care of the rest if you can. I'm gonna stir up the fire. It'll be dark soon; I'm gonna go outside and look around. I think it's safe, but â€“ just in case.'

Her big eyes followed him as he went out the door. He could sense her wanting to cling to him. The girl was filled with fear; he somehow knew she had been running from something but he didn't know what. She saw in him a protector, a bulwark against what it was that frightened her. He wondered what could engender so much fear in a girl so pretty.

3. Chapter 3

PRESENT

It was dark when Billy hit the next town. He was exhausted, dirty and hungry but bent on finding the girl. He hitched his palomino, now fully recovered, to the rail and went into the Star Bar and Grill. He dragged his hat off and made his inquiry at the bar.

'Lily Varnell?' the woman at the bar repeated. 'Who told you she'd be here?'

'The stage driver up at Killion Station, he wasn't sureâ€“'

The woman laughed. 'Who is? There are a half a dozen people in this town who'd like to lay hands on her â€| and that crooked Farrow gang. She run out â€| about four weeks ago.'

'Oh, she did â€| you don't know, um â€| you don't know where she -'

She looked at him appraisingly. 'Sure seem anxious to see her. What'd she steal from you, boy?'

Billy replaced his hat. 'Oh, I'm â€| looking for a girl she might know.' He turned to walk away.

'Buy a girl a drink, and I might have some information for you.'

Billy dug in his pocket and handed her a silver dollar. She smiled.

'Try Kelly's up at Greenbriar. She's at the Greenbriar Saloon.'

'Much obliged,' he said.

-oOo-

Back in Lincoln, Pat Garrett wearily left his office, locked up and unhitched his horse. Across the street, the livery stable owner hailed him. 'Wait up, I'll walk home with ya.'

'Aren't you closing up kind of late?' asked Pat.

'Aw, I had the place locked up twenty minutes ago and that man Canfield come in - didn't want his wagon, had me find a saddle for his horse. You'd think the devil was after him, the way he rode out of town.'

'Did he say where he was going?'

'Naw, didn't say nothin,' but he won't get very far with that miserable horse of his. Took the back alleyway, too.'

With a sinking heart, Pat wearily mounted his horse and headed out.

Mr. Traker called after him. 'Now â€| now where you goin'?' Hell, Billy, then that Canfield fella, now the sheriff. Where was everybody off to? he wondered.

FLASHBACK

Billy Bonney had known the love and comfort of many women, but this one struck him in a way no other girl had. Maybe it was because she was so vulnerable and deep inside he'd always yearned for someone to lean on him.

He didn't want to analyze it too deeply. It was enough that she and he were here, dependent on each other, surviving day by day and swiftly falling in love.

He was cleaning and rebandaging her many cuts, talking comfortably to her when it struck him that he had known her an entire day and didn't know her name. Nor she his.

'This one on your shoulder,' he said, indicating one of the deeper cuts, 'looks like you need stitches, but I don't have needle or thread â€| we'll just have to make do with salve and a bandage.' He wrapped the strip of cloth beneath her arm and tied it in place.
'That'll have to do.'

'It's fine. Thank you.'

'Listen, uh, I've been calling you Miss now for a while, and I'd like to be able to call you something else. What's your name?'

She didn't answer right away. The veil of fear dropped over her face; it was as if she wasn't sure she could trust him, after all.

'It's â€| Lily. My name is Lily. Lily Varnell.'

'Pretty name. Mine is Bonney â€| William H. Bonney. I go by Billy.'

'Billy,' she repeated. 'Billy Bonney. It â€| it sings.'

He grinned. 'Yeah, I guess it does.'

She smiled back at him. 'It's a nice name, Billy.'

With this exchange of information she seemed to relax. They regarded each other for a moment.

'Listen, uh, I was figuring on camping out here a spell, getting you better, then taking you home.'

Her eyes grew wide with fear.

'Please no. I can't go home. I don't want to go home - ever. I'm going â€| '

He waited for her to finish. When she didn't he spoke up. 'Where, Lily? Where are you going?'

'Somewhere. I don't know where yet. Just not home!'

'What are you running from? Yeah, I can tell. You radiate fear; you're scared stiff. What's wrong?'

'Let's not talk about it now, Billy. Please. I feel safe with you. Like you said â€| let me heal up a bit then we'll go â€| somewhere. I'm â€| I'm kind of hungry. Could I have some more stew?'

Billy smiled. 'After that, young lady, how about you take a nap.'

'Will you lie down with me? No sense sleeping on that hard floor. I need â€| I need to feel safe.'

With her green eyes seeming to search his soul, he was caught like a

fish on a hook. He knelt by the bunk, took her face in his hands, and kissed her.

Later that night, Billy woke to find Lily resting her head on his shoulder, her arm over him, snuggling close. He liked the feeling. He recalled what an old squaw-man had once told him, that tepee living beat living on the range alone all to hell. The old man didn't mean this, he was sure, but it was a nice thought, to have someone all your own to love, to work for, to live with and plan for the future.

'Lily â€“ are you asleep?'

'No,' she whispered. 'I was listening to your heartbeat.'

He grinned in the darkness. 'I can't sleep either. I was just listening to the wind outside. Looking at that honeysuckle growing there over the window. Looks nice in the moonlight. Just â€“ wonderin' what it would be like to have a home of my own.'

'Don't you have a home? A woman? Kids?'

He sighed. 'There've been women â€“ nothing that lasted. As for a home, I, uh, live in a bunkhouse on a rich man's ranch. He's been good to me â€“ and I have one friend â€“ the sheriff of Lincoln County. He and I have tangled at times but he's always come through for me when I needed him.'

'Like you've done for me.'

'Aw, way more than that, Lily. See, I've got a rep as a fast gun around here, and everybody seems to want a try at me. Most of 'em â€“ well, Patrick always said it was self-defense. I've killed a lot of people, Lily, I don't mind telling you that â€“ but it was always self-defense. Nobody just wants to let somebody kill 'em. You know how gun-happy people are around here. Law's stretched too thin to do much. You gotta protect yourself.'

Billy rose up on his elbow and looked down at her, curling a lock of her hair around his finger. 'In fact, if you don't carry a gun and have some skill with it, you don't live long. You had asked about a woman â€“ well, there was one that I was serious about. She was one of those, what do you call 'em, Quaker people. Lived and breathed the Bible. Had to take my gunbelt off every time I went in the house. Well, Lily, I took an oath. I took two oaths, really. I swore I'd lay down my guns. For her. I swore on my love for her. That wasn't good enough. She had me swear on the Bible. So when some men came gunning for me and I was gettin' the crap beat outta me by one of 'em, she snuck a rifle out of the saddle holster and I thought maybe I'd make it out of there. I laid the guy out but the other one was gonna shoot me. I yelled at her to shoot him. But she didn't. I was a dead man. But ol' Patrick, he rides up just in the nick of time and saved my life. I looked at her, Lily, and I knew. She couldn't do anything with the gun and I couldn't do anything without it. She wasn't willing to go against her all-mighty principles, even to save the life of the man she loved. I knew then it was over. I never saw her again. They moved on not too long after. I guess my presence in town bothered her.'

'She didn't deserve you, Billy. You need a woman who sees you for

what you are and loves you anyway.'

Billy kissed her softly. 'Get some sleep,' he admonished her, or you don't get the duck eggs I found for breakfast.'

She snuggled deeper into his arms and fell asleep. More content than he'd ever been in his life, Billy was soon asleep as well.

PRESENT

Billy rode all night, arriving in Greenbriar early in the morning. A light fog blanketed the town. He spotted the Greenbriar Saloon, tied up and went in.

A woman of rather ill repute was seated at one of the tables, playing solitaire. She turned as Billy walked in. He glanced up the stairs.

'Bar's closed,' she announced. 'What else you looking for?'

'A woman. Named Lily Varnell,' Billy said.

'Well, you're feasting your eyes on her. Fine feathers, perfume â€‘ everything goes with it.' She placed several cards down.

Billy approached her and sat down, uninvited.

'Got any money?'

'No money and no time to waste,' he said. 'Lookin' for a girl with red hair and green eyes.'

'So is every other man I ever met in my whole life.'

Someone was coming down the stairs. Billy turned. There was a God, for there she was, dressed for the evening in a green, low-cut satin dress decorated with sequins. When she saw Billy her hand went to her mouth and she fled back upstairs. He raced up after her while the real Lily Varnell calmly continued her game. They'd work it out, she thought. She'd seen it a dozen times.

FLASHBACK

The next morning, Lily climbed out of bed for the first time, wrapped in the blanket. She stirred the fire and gathered her things. They were stiff, dirty, but dry. She donned what remained of her chemise and put on her dress. Moving gingerly because of her injuries, she had coffee making, stew warmed up and three boiled duck eggs ready when Billy awoke.

'You were more tired than you let on,' she said. He sat up, ran his fingers through his long, thick brown hair and sniffed appreciably.

'Is that coffee? Did you cook?'

'What, you think I can't? If you think all I can do is fall into icy water you've another think coming,' she teased.

Billy took her in his arms and kissed her more passionately than he'd ever kissed anyone. 'Lily,' he breathed in her ear.

'Breakfast is getting cold. Go outside and wash up. It'll be ready.'

He was loathe to let go of her but he heeded her wishes. He sat cross-legged on the floor, eating voraciously, watching her sitting on the bunk, perfectly framed by the window's hanging honeysuckle. He hated his own cooking and this was the same thing, rabbit with onion, berries and eggs but it tasted different. Even if she'd just warmed it up, it tasted different. He found himself wishing for the same scene, the same woman and even the same menu all the rest of the mornings of his life.

He grinned at her as he got to his feet. 'That was the last of the rabbit. What do you want next? Squirrel, rabbit, gopher or rattlesnake?'

'Anything that doesn't get you bitten!'

'Squirrel it is. Maybe we'll have another pass at rabbit tomorrow. The restaurant here doesn't have much on the menu.'

She laughed and it was like a tinkling cymbal to his ears. He gathered up his rifle and went outside to saddle the bay.

'Back in a minute,' he said, and he was.

PRESENT

Billy followed the girl to her room and slammed the door. He was furious. 'Sure gave me a lot of sweet talk, didn't ya?!!' He pulled her necklace out of his pocket and thrust it at her. 'What'd you give me this for?! For a joke?!' He threw the necklace on the bed. 'I told you things about me â€| how I felt â€| I never told anybody! You're a liar!'

'Billy, I had no choice.'

'Yeah â€| you're good. You're real good,' he jeered, laughing, moving away from her.

She followed him across the room.

'I never spent three days in all my life like I spent with you, Billy.'

'I'll bet.' He was grinning at her, mocking her.

'You're wrong. I fell in love with you, Billy, just as you fell in love with me.'

'Then why did you lie to me?!"

'Because I had no choice!' She sat down on the bed and regarded him, sadly. This happened to me once before, two years ago.'

She sat down on the bed.

'Another man I met â€| we were going to be married. We found his body in an alleyway the night before he was to take me away. He'd been shot in the back. Somebody'd taken his gun. The day you saved my life in Baker Canyon - I found the gun in the bottom drawer of my father's bureau. For two years it had been there. My father killed him! And I knew that he'd kill any man who ever came near me. So I ran away. And I ran my horse over the cliff, deliberately! But â€| when I woke up in your arms, Billy â€| I knew that I wanted to live. But I knew that my father would follow me and find me with you. That's why I ran away from you.'

'Well, why did you come to Lily Varnell?'

'Because I'd heard of her â€| and I knew where she was. And â€| it's the only way I could figure to get away from my father and be done with you. The men I'd meet here I knew I'd never fall in love with.'

Billy knelt by the bed and gently took her chin in his hand. 'We're gonna be married,' he said. 'I'm not afraid of your father.'

Her father was at that moment on the road to Greenbriar.

FLASHBACK

The next two days were bliss for Billy Bonney. Lily never said much about herself, deftly turning questions away, which kept an air of mystery over her. It was intriguing. Instead, she focused on him, telling him sweet things that were music to his ears. Meanwhile he told her about himself, so much more than he'd ever spoken to about another living soul. They were, in a short space of time, coming together.

The second night they made love. The third day dawned. Their briefly established relationship was cemented but it would soon end. Lily knew this; Billy didn't. As if to store up as much love and devotion as she could, knowing she had to leave, she never left his side that last day. She had fallen in love with him and he with her. They made love through the afternoon while the breeze carried the scent of honeysuckle in to waft around them. They prepared and ate dinner and made love again that night.

Sometime in the early hours of dawn Lily dressed, took off her necklace and enclosed it in Billy's hand. She cried silently as she lightly kissed his forehead and walked out the door. She put the bridle on the horse and led it out so it wouldn't wake Billy. She mounted the horse bareback and without a backward look, rode away.

-oOo-

In the morning, Billy awoke to find yet another dream shattered. A locket, a saddle, and three days of memories were all he had left. Heartsore, he lifted the heavy saddle and started off on foot for Lincoln.

PRESENT

Billy walked up to a store proprietor dusting his wares on the

street. The man greeted him.

'Yes, sir, welcome. What can I do for you today?'

'Just kind of lookin' around here; you, uh, wouldn't happen to have any dancin' shoes, wouldja, or something like, uh, a lady could get married in?'

'Maybe.'

'Show me whatcha got.'

While Billy was shopping for a pair of shoes for his new bride-to-be, her father rode into town. He saw Billy's horse tied to the rail.

Across the street, the store proprietor showed Billy a beautiful pair of lacy white high heels.

'How much?' asked Billy. For a cowhand, price was always the top consideration, but the shoes were exquisite. He only hoped he could afford them. Maybe he could make medicine with the man if the price was beyond his reach.

'Right off the boat from Galveston, imported straight from Paris, yessirree, hand-sewn,' the man said. Billy's estimate inched higher. He felt sure he couldn't afford them.

'How much?' he asked again.

'Five dollars!'

Billy breathed a sigh of relief. 'All right, sir!' He pulled a bill from his pocket. 'You just made yourself a deal!'

-oOo-

Lily, or Phoebe as she was now to be known, was dressing in a new, respectable calico readying for her wedding. She heard the door open behind her. She smiled in anticipation.

'Billy? Billy, is that you?'

A dressing screen hid the intruder from her until she heard his voice. She went cold all over.

'No â€| it isn't Billy ...'

The old man swept the dressing screen to the side. Phoebe turned to face her father, quivering in fear.

'â€|but he led me to you, Phoebe.'

'Pa? Pa, don't hurt him!'

Her father struck her several times. She screamed as she was bent over the bedrail by the blows.

'Who's to blame a father for killing a man who brings his daughter to a place like this?!"

She ran to the door, trying to escape. He blocked her path, gripped her in one arm with his hand over his mouth. In his anger, the old man's strength was phenomenal.

'We'll just wait here,' he mumbled, taking out a pistol with his free hand.

Billy came through the door, whistling, the beautiful white shoes in his hand. 'Phoebe?'

'Mr. Bonney!' the old man shouted.

Billy whirled. Phoebe screamed and broke loose from her father's grip. She flung herself out of the way; Billy had already drawn his gun. He threw himself backward and fired as he landed on the floor. The bullet ripped into the old man's stomach as his own gun went off harmlessly. The old man refused to go down. Instead, he managed to raise the pistol again and aim it at Billy, still lying on his back on the floor, but Phoebe threw herself forward and landed on Billy just as her father's gun went off. The bullet pierced her back.

The old man's face as he simultaneously died on his feet and saw his daughter dead by his own hand mirrored the horror reflected in Billy's face as his beloved collapsed in his arms. The old man fell, dead.

-oOo-

Pat Garrett arrived at last in Greenbriar. Seeing Billy's horse and Canfield's horse tied together, he figured he was too late. Billy might at this very moment be dead, by Canfield's gun. He ran into the saloon and up the stairs to the rooms. When he found Phoebe's room he was heartsick to find Canfield dead and Billy sitting on the floor with Phoebe clutched in his arms, his face buried in her hair. Pat closed the door. Billy glanced up at his friend and put his head back down, murmuring to the girl he loved.

Phoebe looked up at Billy. 'Honeysuckle, Billy, remember? Hanging over the cabin window?'

He held her tightly, rocking her, sobbing. As he held her, she closed her eyes. Her arm fell from his shoulder. She had died in his arms.

-oOo-

Pat helped Billy with the arrangements; not for a wedding but for a funeral. He paid for the undertaker, who assured him that father and daughter would be laid to rest â€‘ in separate cemeteries. Billy would have it no other way. It was too far to take Phoebe home, he realized.

Billy clutched the pretty white shoes as he and Pat mounted up for the long journey home. On the way out of town, they spied a little Mexican girl playing by the side of the road.

'Billy,' Pat called to his friend. He pointed to the shoes. As one who himself had lost his new wife on her wedding day, who'd been through the same agony of losing a woman he dearly loved, he could

advise his friend.

'Leave them behind with the rest of it.'

Hard words, but Billy knew Pat was right. A lone man couldn't lug a string of mementoes along; the weight of the memories was enough.

Billy rode up to the Mexican child. He handed her the shoes. 'For when you grow up, Sweetheart.'

She looked up at him and smiled.

Billy urged the palomino forward and Pat Garrett swiftly followed. They rode away from Greenbriar and its memories at top speed.

THE END

End
file.